

Bodies, Burials & Bones

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling. If we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. The book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 50.

Genesis chapter 50, and we'll read the last verses of the book of Genesis. Verse 24. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Whenever we hear that someone in our congregation or in our community or even within family or friends, whenever we hear that they have passed away, it always comes as a shock. Even though their death may be expected, it's still a shock. And whether they've passed away suddenly or slowly, whether painfully or peacefully, the news always comes as a shock because it always brings home to us the reality, the reality and the finality of death. You know, as we've been repeatedly reminded over recent days in our community, death is an enemy. Death is the last enemy. Death is the great separator because it severs our ties. It separates us from family and friends, but it also shocks us in the most personal way. And when death barges into our homes, it not only brings crying and chaos and confusion, it also leaves families with brokenness and a burial to organize. And for a grieving family trying to process the loss of a loved one, the thought of organizing a funeral, it often seems so overwhelming for them. Because as you know, there's a lot to deal with when someone dies. But you know, we ought also to be so thankful for our island communities, especially at times like these, that family and friends and neighbors, they support one another, they visit one another, they provide meals for one another in their times of grief and sorrow. And as I've said to you before, as I minister, I counted the greatest privilege. People often ask me, how would you describe the ministry? There's only one word, it is privilege. It's a privilege to be part of grieving families and their process of grieving. And to read God's word with them, to pray with them, to seek comfort and consolation from the God of all comfort. I counted the greatest privilege. Because in our time of need, to whom else can we go? Who else can we go to but to Jesus, the one who promises to bear our griefs and to carry our sorrows? And you know, that's where we're being pointed again this morning, in this concluding chapter of the book of Genesis. Because the concluding chapter of Genesis, it opens and closes with death. My friend, the concluding chapter of Genesis, it opens and closes with the death of

Jacob, and then the death of Joseph. It opens and closes with the death of a father and the death of a son. But what's important about the father and the son is that they lived well, and they died well with Jesus as their Savior. And of course, with the death of Joseph, as we said, this brings an end to our study in the life of Joseph. But this morning, I want us to think about this concluding chapter and see that we're confronted with bodies, burials, and bones. Bodies, burials, and bones. Because we see preparing the body, promising the burial, and planning the bones. So first of all, we see preparing the body.

Preparing the body. We read at the end of chapter 49. It says, You know, the description given in these verses is very familiar to us as a congregation and also a community. Because like Joseph and his brothers, there are many who have sat around the deathbed of a loved one and watched them draw their last breath. And in that moment, that moment of silence, there's this overwhelming sorrow and sadness at the reality and also the finality of death.

[5 : 41] And when Jacob died, his children mourned over their father. As any child would, they held him, we read, they wept over him, they kissed him, they mourned over their father. Now, Jacob, as you know, he was the father of 13 children. He had 12 sons and one daughter. And what we learn from Joseph's reaction to his father's death is that grief is the most natural response to death. Grief is the most natural response to death. And I say that because, you know, it's not good to harden our heart to the reality and finality of death. And I say that especially in light of recent days. Tomorrow morning will be the fifth funeral in a fortnight in our community, in a small community. And it's a reminder to us that death is final. It's a reality and it's a finality. But, you know, far too often we can harden our heart to the reality and the finality of death. Far too often we can become desensitized and dull and even deadened to the painful reality and the powerful finality of death.

But, of course, death, when it barges into our personal lives and into the privacy of our homes and our families, it leaves us with brokenness. And for some people, it softens their heart, but only for a while. It softens their heart under the gospel for a little while.

But sadly, with so many of our unconverted friends, it doesn't last long. Because once it has passed, once it's all over and things return to a level of normality, their heart hardens again.

You, my unconverted friend, here or at home this morning, don't harden your heart to the painful reality and the powerful finality of death. It's the devil's greatest lie.

We'll tell you it's not coming to you yet. It's far off in the distance. But, my friend, do not desensitize or dull or even deaden your heart to the truth and the reality of death. Because the truth about death, my friend, is that it's an enemy. It's the last enemy. It's a great enemy.

[8 : 16] It's the great separator. Because it severs your ties. It separates us from family and friends. And it shocks us in the most powerful way. And as someone once said, death is a faithful visitor.

And we have seen it faithfully visiting our community over the past fortnight. Going to different homes and different families. It's a faithful visitor. And when it comes, it speaks into our lives so loudly and so clearly because it reminds us, does it not? Or it should. It should remind us to number our days.

That we may apply our heart unto wisdom. It should remind us that we are to put our house in order. It should remind us that it's now time to seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near. You know, that's why the Bible says to us, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. Do not harden your heart. You know, Joseph's heart was certainly soft to the painful reality and the finality of death. Because as he watched and witnessed his father passing away, he did as any son or daughter would. He held him, he wept over him, he kissed him, and he mourned over his father. But you know, Jacob's, or Joseph's reaction to Jacob's death, it reminds me that it doesn't matter how old someone is when they die. When you lose someone you love, it's never long enough.

Jacob, as you know, he was 147 years old when he died, which is twice the age of most people nowadays when they die. And yet for Joseph and his brothers who held and wept and kissed their father, 147 years was still not long enough. Because when you lose someone you love, it's never long enough.

But as every grieving family knows, when death barges into our homes and when it breaks up the home and preparations for burial have to be made, funeral arrangements have to be organized, the body also needs to be prepared for burial. And that's what we see Joseph doing.

[10 : 45] We see him doing that in verse 2. We're told that Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel, that is Jacob. Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept over him, or for him, seventy days. Now in our own culture and community, when a loved one dies, they receive what they call the last offices, where their body is washed with dignity and respect and prepared for burial. But in ancient Egypt, when Joseph called the physicians to embalm his father, Jacob, his last offices, they weren't going to be completed within a couple of hours. Because as we read, it would take a total of forty days initially, but seventy days in total to prepare Jacob's body for burial. And although Joseph didn't believe in all these ancient Egyptian rituals, the Egyptian culture and custom for preparing a body for burial was, as you know, mummification. They would mummify a body. Now mummification, it wasn't done to everyone, because it was a very expensive process.

Therefore mummification, it was only done to those who were wealthy. And as the father of the prime minister in Egypt, no expense would have been spared for Jacob's funeral. And I'm sure you've read about the process of mummification. It's fascinating, but it's also very gruesome. And I think I'll spare you the details this morning. But the reason the process took so long, the reason it took up to seventy days, is because prior to mummification, the body was covered in what was a salt substance. And it was covered for forty days in this salt substance to draw out all the moisture from the body. And then after forty days, there would be this process of treating the body with herbs and oils and resin prior to being embalmed. So the body would be embalmed head to toe in linen bandages, which also took another fifteen days. And so by day seventy, the body was prepared for burial.

But you know, as we think about Jacob's embalmers preparing the body for burial, you know, I can't help but think of Jacob's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because you know, he didn't have the privilege of embalmers spending seventy days preparing his dead body for burial. But he did have one woman.

One woman, we're told in the Gospels, who came to Jesus while he was still alive. He hadn't even died. This woman came to Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and she came to prepare his body for burial.

That's what Jesus says. Do you remember when this woman came into the house? It's in Luke chapter 7. You can look it up when you go home. She came into the house where Jesus was sitting with Simon the Pharisee and all of his Pharisees, and she came in with an alabaster box of precious ointment.

[14 : 12] And ever so quietly, this woman, she knelt down at the feet of Jesus, and she was there weeping. Weeping at the feet of Jesus. And as she wept, there were tears streaming down her face onto the feet of Jesus. And then we read that she began wiping the feet of Jesus with her long hair, and she was kissing the feet of Jesus. And then we're told that she anointed the feet of Jesus.

And many of those present who were watching this woman do it, even the disciples, they were disgusted, they were disappointed at her actions. But Jesus said about her, he said, and what Jesus said about her was so important, because he said, she has done a beautiful thing. She has done a beautiful thing.

She has prepared me for burial. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she loved much. She loved much. And you know, that's the promise of the gospel, my friend.

Your sins, which are many, can be forgiven. Coffee, Christ offers free forgiveness to everyone, everywhere. Your sins, which are many, can be forgiven. If you look to Jesus and live for Jesus and love Jesus, she has done a beautiful thing. That's what Jesus said about this woman who prepared his body for burial. She has done a beautiful thing. And her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she loved much. She loved much. And so we see preparing the body, but secondly, promising the burial. Promising the burial. Look at verse 4. And when the days of weeping for him, that is Jacob, when they were passed, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, My father made me swear, saying, I'm about to die in my tomb that I hewn out for myself in the land of Canaan. There you shall bury me. Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return. And Pharaoh answered, Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear. As you know, the day of a funeral is a very difficult day for a family, because it's the day on which a grieving family performs what is the last duties, the last duties for their loved one. And it's a day on which the remains of their loved one, they take their last journey, their last journey to their final resting place, where they await the last day, the day of resurrection. But you know, when it came to Jacob's burial, the duties which Joseph and his brothers had to perform, and the last journey which Jacob's remains would have to take in this world to their final resting place. It wasn't a short distance. They had to travel 500 miles to the land of Canaan.

You remember back in chapter 47, at the end of the chapter, Jacob, he made his son Joseph. He made him promise that he was to be buried in the family lair in Canaan. Jacob called Joseph, you remember, he called him to kneel down at his father's bedside, and then put his hand under his thigh, which might seem like a strange thing to do. But in the ancient world, that's how you made your will. You didn't write a will. You told someone to put their hand under your thigh. And there was a symbol of promise, where you were promising that you were going to fulfill the will and the wishes of this person who was dying. And Jacob's request to Joseph was a simple one. Don't bury me in Egypt. Bury me with my family. Bury me in the family lair with those who have gone before me. And as you'd expect, Joseph, he acquiesced and he accepted his father's wishes and his father's will. And of course, Jacob's desire and determination to be buried in the family lair. You know, it's interesting. Why does he want to go all the way back to Egypt?

[18 : 36] Why does he want back to Canaan? Why does he want to go home? But you know, it's a very common thing. His determination and his desire to be buried in the family lair, it's a very common thing. We see it actually in our own community, don't we? Where remains, they return home to be buried. They come home from the mainland. And that's also why we have a funeral association, which helps to support families in their time of grief. But what we read in this chapter is that Joseph's family didn't need the financial support of a funeral association because they had the financial support of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

And Pharaoh, he actually provided a state funeral for Joseph's father. Because as we read, along with Jacob's family, all the servants of Pharaoh, all the elders of the household, all the elders of the land of Egypt, they all traveled, we read, in chariots and horsemen.

They traveled as a great royal company. And they all took this 500-mile journey back to Jacob's homeland, the land of Canaan. And even when they arrived in Canaan, we read that they mourned over Jacob a further seven days. And you know, it must have been such a spectacle to see all these Egyptians, all these royal dignitaries arriving in Canaan for the week. There was probably hundreds of them.

And it was such a spectacle that we're told in the passage that the locals, the Canaanites, they renamed the place after seeing what they saw. They called it, as we read, Abel Mizarim, which means the meadow of Egypt. They saw all these Egyptians gathered, so they called the place Abel Mizarim, the meadow of Egypt. And so after two months, or two months after his death, Jacob was laid to rest, we're told, in the cave at Machpelah, east of Mamre. He was buried in the family Leah. And he was buried with Sarah and Abraham, his granny and Shennar. He was buried with Isaac and Rebecca, who were his father and mother. And he was also buried with Leah, his first wife. And you know, when you think about it, the reverence and the respect that Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, the reverence and respect he must have had for Joseph, that he would not only provide a funeral, but he would also pay for this state funeral of Joseph's father, Jacob. But more than that, as it was the custom and culture in Egypt, Jacob would have also been buried with riches.

That's how Egyptians buried people. They always buried them with riches. And so, Jacob's coffin would have contained gold and silver and riches. And you know, my friend, Jacob's funeral, it was a royal and regal event. It was a massive event. Everyone knew about it, not only in Egypt, but also in Canaan. It was a royal funeral. And there was this great company of chariots and horsemen.

[21 : 58] And you think about Jacob's funeral, and then you compare it and contrast it to the funeral of Jacob's greater son, the Lord Jesus. As you know, his funeral was the complete opposite. Even though Jesus was the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who was crowned in glory, and yet, as Paul says, although he was rich, rich. Yet for our sakes, he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. You know, my friend, the glory of the gospel is that our Jesus, he humbled himself. He humbled himself from the crown of glory to the cradle in Bethlehem, down to the cross of Calvary. He was rich in glory, and yet for our sakes, he became poor. He humbled himself, and he was obedient all the way to death. Even death, on a cross. He humbled himself down, down, down, down, from the crown to the cradle to the cross, from glory to Golgotha to the grave. And unlike Jacob, our Jesus, he didn't have a state funeral.

He didn't have all the royal dignitaries of Israel present. He wasn't buried with all these riches of Israel. Instead, when the King of kings and when the Lord of lords breathed his last, they left him hanging on a Roman cross. They left him nailed, and he was there, battered and broken, until his body was begged for from Pilate. Joseph of Arimathea, we're told, and Nicodemus, the man who came to Jesus by night, they came and removed the body of Jesus from the cross.

They then wrapped it in a linen shroud, and they rested it in the tomb. And you know, in complete contrast to the great royal company of chariots and horsemen at the funeral of Jacob, there was only two at the funeral of Jesus. There were only two people at the funeral of Jesus.

Not even his family were there. Not even the disciples. Only two turned up. And yet, like the burial of Jacob and the burial of Jesus, they were both promised.

It had been promised, prophesied, and preached, and even proclaimed by Isaiah 800 years before it took place. Isaiah 53 says, He made his grave with a wicked and with a rich man in his death.

[24 : 40] Although he had done no violence, neither was deceit found in his mouth. And you know, my friend, the wonder of the gospel is that although Jesus was rich in glory, rich in glory, yet for your sake, for your sake, he became poor, so that you, by his poverty, might become rich. That's the preparation and promise that we see in the gospel, that Jesus became poor so that we might be made rich.

And you know, my friend, thinking about this burial and the burial of Jesus, you know, it doesn't matter how many times I have to stand over an open grave in a cemetery. And then you have to address a family and friends and a congregation and a community. And you might wonder, well, what is Myrtle thinking right at this moment? And I'm thinking, Lord, help me. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to say.

But you know, I'm always reminded that it is the most solemn thing that we ever do as human beings, is lay someone on the ground. It's the most solemn thing. And in that moment of laying to rest the remains of a loved one, we're not only confronted with the painful reality and the powerful finality of death. We're also reminded that whatever kind of funeral we have, whether public or like Jesus' funeral, private, whether stately or very simple, whether royal or just regular, whatever kind of funeral we have, it doesn't matter who we are in this world. All we are given is six feet.

All we are given is six feet. And as Job said, when, as a father who loved and lost, Job made that amazing statement. He said, naked I came into this world, and naked I shall return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Do you know, my friend, the best way to be prepared for your own burial, and as you know, I do not say this lightly, the best way to be prepared for your own burial is to live well by looking, loving, and living for Jesus, and to die well, trusting in Jesus with all your heart. The best way to prepare for your own burial is to live well, is to live well, and to die well in Jesus. So preparing the body, promising the burial, and lastly, planning the bones. Planning the bones. Look at verse 14.

[27 : 45] It says, after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father. When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, it may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.

You know, after a funeral, there's always a period of deep mourning for a family. Everyone else, they all go back to their routine and back to normal life. But for the family who are involved, the family who have loved and lost, they have to try and come to terms with what has taken place in their experience. And that can take a long time. Grieving is a long process.

But what sometimes happens, especially when both parents pass away, just like we see in this chapter, what sometimes happens is that family ties between siblings, they're no longer as strong. They're not as close as they once were. And sometimes there's drifting. Sometimes there's distancing. Sometimes there's even division between siblings, to the point that some siblings, they begin to reveal their true color. And that's what we see in this closing section, in the concluding chapter of the life of Joseph. Because after Jacob's funeral, Joseph's brothers then begin thinking. And they begin thinking that Joseph was going to take revenge on them now that their father has passed away. And Joseph's brothers did what we can often be guilty of doing. Joseph's brothers did what we can often be guilty of doing. They invented a whole scenario in their minds, thinking that Joseph now hated them, and he wanted to take revenge on them, and he was going to do something to them. When in fact, that wasn't the case at all.

I don't know if that's what you do. You invent things in your own mind. But in reality, it's not the case at all. And Joseph, he was actually, as we read, he was really upset that his brothers would even think that of him.

That he would take revenge on his brothers. Because Joseph, he confesses to his brothers. He comes to them, and he confesses to his brothers the most memorable words in the life of Joseph.

[30 : 10] You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. You know, what a statement to make. You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

Joseph, he comforted and consoled his brothers, affirming and assuring them that even though they had seized and separated and sold him into slavery at the age of 17, Joseph was telling them this was all according to the Lord's perfect plan, path, purpose, and providence in his life.

Though everything Joseph had gone through, everything he had gone through, it had caused him to grow in grace. That he's saying, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

It had caused him to grow in knowledge of his Savior, Jesus Christ. And Joseph, in his experience, he had learned, he had learned about the Lord, that his ways are not my ways. His thoughts are not my thoughts. You know, Joseph, he had even learned to say as it was with William Cowper, God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. And you know, my friend, the life of Joseph was a life of faith. He lived and trusted in the Lord with everything he encountered and experienced.

[31 : 41] Because he learned that it's the Lord who writes the story of our lives. He is the author of the story. He's the director in the drama. We might not understand the storyline, as we've said, throughout the life of Joseph. We might not see all the twists and the turns in the narrative, but he's the one who writes the pages. He's the one who turns the pages. And in every storm of sin and sickness and suffering and sorrow, the wonder is the Lord is still there. And he's working out his sovereign will. And he's working by his grace for our good and to his glory. He's working by his grace for our good and to his glory.

But you know, Joseph, he was not only one who lived by faith, he also died in faith. We're told in Hebrews 11 that by faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, he made mention of the exodus and gave direction concerning his bones. And that's what we read at the end of the chapter.

We read in verse 24, You know, before Joseph died, Just like his father, he made plans. But Joseph, he made plans for his bones.

He made plans for his bones by a promise. He made plans for his bones by a promise. He made his brothers promise that when the exodus takes place, which to them would have been a completely alien thought. But when the exodus takes place, they will take up his bones out of Egypt.

So when the exodus happens, they're to take his bones out. Take them up out of Egypt to the promised land. And that's what happened. You go into the book of Exodus chapter 13. We read that 430 years later, on the night of the exodus, Moses took Joseph's bones with him according to Joseph's promise.

[34 : 10] And then you read through the narrative, keep going to the book of Joshua, after the 40 years of wandering through the wilderness, nearly 500 years after Joseph had made this promise about his bones.

We read at the end of the book of Joshua, chapter 24, that when the Israelites entered the promised land, they buried the bones of Joseph at Shechem, according to his promise.

They buried the bones of Joseph. And of course, the question we should be asking as we read this is, well, why? Why? Why did Joseph make plans for his bones? Why did he make plans for his bones by a promise? Why did Joseph not just want to be buried in Egypt with his family and his children? Why did Joseph ensure that his bones would be taken up out of Egypt and taken into the promised land? Why did he insist that the Israelites carry his bones for 40 years round the wilderness and make sure that they cross the Jordan into the promised land of Israel? And the answer, to provide us a picture and promise.

of resurrection. It's all to provide for us a picture and promise of resurrection. Because according to God's great plan and purpose, Joseph went down into Egypt. He went down into Egypt according to God's plan and purpose. And he came up out of Egypt into the promised land according to God's plan and purpose.

He went down into Egypt and came up out of Egypt, which provides for us a picture and promise of resurrection. Because it was according to God's great plan and purpose that the greater than Joseph, our Lord Jesus Christ, he humbled himself down, down, down from the crown to the cradle to the cross, from glory to Golgotha to the grave. But on that first Lord's Day morning, on that morning of resurrection, Jesus, as we're told, he went up, up, up. Jesus was raised from the dead. He was highly exalted. He ascended up on high. He led the captives free. He put all his enemies under his feet. And through his resurrection, we have the promise this morning of the promise, as we were saying to the children, that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Do you know, my friend, as we conclude our study in the life of Joseph, and as we conclude it with the death of Joseph, we have to see that it's picturing and it's promising and it's pointing us to the life and death and resurrection of the greater than Joseph, that is Jesus Christ. It's pointing us to Jesus because he's the one who calls us to live well. And he's the one who calls us to die well by trusting in him with all our heart. My friend, you make sure that you live well and that you die well trusting in Jesus. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Now let us pray.

[37 : 41] O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the wonder of thy word, that thou art the God who has planned and promised and even prepared all things for us, that we are able to see even the wonder of Jesus in the book of beginnings, in the book of Genesis. And Lord, we do pray that we would see Jesus more clearly, that we would love him more earnestly, that we would walk with him more closely, and that we would seek him even while he is to be found and to call upon him while he is near.

Lord, bless thy truth to our souls. May it be a comfort and an encouragement to us to remind us that in everything that the Lord is there, that he is still with us, still upon our side, still strengthening and still sustaining us. Bless us then, we pray. Go before us. Take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

We're going to bring our time to a conclusion this morning by singing the closing verses of Psalm 84. Psalm 84, again in the Scottish Psalter, it's on page 339.

Psalm 84, we're singing from verse 7 down to the end of the psalm. Psalm 84, again in the Bible.

Down to the Lord at length. Down to the end of the psalm.

[39 : 25] Down to the end of the psalm of Psalm 84. To God's praise. Psalm 84, again in the Bible. Psalm 84, again in the Bible. Psalm 84, again in the Bible. Psalm 84, again in the Bible. So they from strength and with it go still forward unto strength, Until the sky on lay appear, before the Lord at length.

Lord God of all, I pray you hear, O Jehoff, so give me your.

Seek out our shield, look all the things, O I am on the tears.

Lord, if thy courts one day exalts a thousand motherly, My bosom's way I keep adorn the pretence of sin.

For God the Lord's house and hand shield, in grace and glory in air, And will with hope no good problem, but I will lightly do you.

[41 : 53] O thou, thou, thou, thou art of us, that my ministry left, With a boy assured confidence, O thee have opened up our hands.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.